

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Mount Vernon City Library Board of Trustees
May 3, 2012**

Board members present: Marija Anderson, Scott Correa, Bill Craig and Carrie Odlin.

Excused absence: Sharon Sackett.

Library staff present: Director Brian Soneda, Deputy Director Sara Holahan and (for part of the meeting) WLA Conference attendees Eileen Barnes, Hannah Boxberger and Irene Nelson.

A. Call to order: Ms. Anderson called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM. Mr. Soneda requested that an item, WLA Conference report, be added to the agenda, as the first item under Director's Reports.

B. Approval of minutes from the April 5, 2012 meeting: Ms. Odlin moved that the April 5, 2012 minutes be approved as submitted. Mr. Correa seconded the motion; all were in favor.

C. Visitors: Steve and Linda Burns. Mr. Correa had invited the Burnses to attend and talk about their "Little Free Library" experience; the *Skagit Valley Herald* had covered the story in a front page article on May 1. While it is fairly early in the life of the Little Free Library in their front yard and the weather has been iffy so far this year, Ms. Burns expressed satisfaction with public use of the library and especially with the public appreciation of the idea. She added that this was a national phenomenon, with over 1,300 such libraries registered across the country, but only seven so far in the state, most of them in the greater Seattle area. She credited a lifelong love of reading and public libraries as a motivator for starting the library, and added that she hoped partakers of the library would seek access to more books at the public library, stating that she was "hoping to get them in here [Mount Vernon City Library]." Mr. Burns talked about building the library "building" from about \$75 worth of material, noting that kits for Little Free Libraries were also available from the organization's website for \$400-\$600. Ms. Burns asked Mr. Soneda about the current support out in the community for another try at a county district library vote; Mr. Soneda noted that it had been over seven years since the last unsuccessful effort and it would take enthusiastic leaders from the community to make the case and get the vote out, but that there was widespread agreement in the Skagit library community that a district library was the best hope for true "universal library service" in the county. Ms. Anderson and Mr. Correa thanked the Burnses for attending and all likewise expressed their appreciation for the presentation and the contribution they have made to their neighborhood and community.

D. Surplus material: Mr. Craig moved that items withdrawn between April 4 and April 28, 2012 be declared surplus and transferred to the Friends of the Mount Vernon Library. Mr. Correa seconded the motion; all were in favor.

E. Approval of Disbursements: Mr. Craig asked about some *Día de los Niños* disbursements listed; Ms. Holahan described the very successful event on April 28 at Hillcrest Park that these expenses were in support of and Mr. Soneda noted that many of these costs were grant-funded and would be reimbursed to the library budget. Mr. Craig then moved that disbursements from Period 4 in the amount of \$15,635.05 be certified as reviewed. Ms. Odlin seconded the motion; all were in favor.

F. Budget report: Mr. Soneda noted that the budget overall, and the lines related to salaries in particular, remain very tight and proportionally on target to be spent out by the end of the year. He noted the impact on the Part-time salary line of two staffing-heavy days in April associated with the commitment to get as many staff members as possible to the recent Washington Library Association Conference, to take advantage of the close location (Tulalip Resort Center). Ms. Anderson added that the unpredictable nature of when and on what items Use Tax would need to be paid also added costs. To the general question of “but are we okay?” Mr. Soneda responded in the affirmative, as long as careful and responsible spending was the norm for the rest of the year.

G. Monthly statistical reports: Mr. Soneda reported a fourth straight month when most of the usage statistics were down. Over the first four months of the year, compared to the same period last year, library circulation is nearly 10% down. Mr. Soneda described this as something that could no longer be called a “blip” but rather needed to be looked at as a trend. Discussion followed on possible causes of this trend. Mr. Correa suggested that the recent economic upturn, as reflected in the Stock Market, had the general public feeling better about spending their discretionary dollars and less likely to turn to the public library and its free offerings. Mr. Soneda agreed that library usage statistics had historically tracked the state of the economy, with usage stronger in hard times and less strong in good times. However, again going back to the blip vs. trend observation, he noted that he, as well as staff in general, was choosing to look at falling usage figures as a wake-up call encouraging creative ways to reinvigorate public use of the library.

H. Director’s Reports:

a. WLA Conference report. Mr. Soneda invited three part-time staff members who had attended the WLA Conference at Tulalip to speak of their experience there, as representatives of the nine MVCL attendees. Eileen Barnes, PSA II-Youth Services, attended several sessions, including one she greatly valued on cataloging, and noted that the Conference was an “overall great experience.” Hannah Boxberger, PSA I-Circulation, first expressed regret that an attendance slot opened up for her due to the illness of an original registrant; she particularly valued the “What’s My Story?” session which focused on Pacific Northwest resources for Native Americans. Irene Nelson, PSA I-Reference, mentioned the excellent Keynote address by reader’s advisory icon, Nancy Pearl, and a session on “Planned Giving” as highlights. All three attendees expressed thanks for the opportunity to attend the conference.

b. MOA between Library and Foundation, status report. Ms. Holahan noted that she would meet with Mr. Soneda, Mayor Boudreau, Finance Director

Huschka and Attorney Rogerson about the content and intent of the MOA the following week, in time to report on progress to the Foundation board at the next Library Foundation meeting on May 14.

c. Regular Part-Time staff turnover/compensation. Mr. Soneda prefaced the discussion by noting that staff had, at the last staff meeting and ongoing through email and smaller group dialog, been working on the very tough issue of part-time staff turnover and the resulting training needed to get new employees up to speed, and how the low pay scale for permanent part-timers, compared to regional comparables like Burlington and Anacortes public libraries, directly impacted this retention and retraining problem. To the question of how significant this pay gap was, Mr. Soneda responded that it was very significant, in the order of \$3.00 or more per hour. Anacortes in particular also provided permanent part-timers with many of the benefits of full-timers, including accrual of vacation time. Mr. Soneda noted that there was a historical context for this situation in place from long before he became director in 2005; Mount Vernon had long placed a priority on budgeting for a strong and diverse book (as well as AV and periodicals) collection. Burlington and Anacortes have appeared to place the strong priority on a higher pay scale. While Anacortes has recently surpassed Mount Vernon in the size of its collection, consistent and virtually unanimous feedback from users of multiple Skagit libraries (and there are many such users because of the reciprocal agreements) credits Mount Vernon City Library with having the best quality collection. An involved discussion followed. Mr. Soneda asked that trustees look at what it would take to raise permanent part-time salaries by \$2.00 per hour, which was the same question he had asked staff to contemplate. Mr. Correa shared figures indicating the specific loss in service, in man hours per day, if the wage increase was made without seeking a budget transfer from non staffing lines. It was shown that it is possible to fund a significant portion of the "wage shortfall" by the redistribution of labor hours within the "Part Time Staffing" budget if the commensurate reductions in available head count/day were palatable. Noting that the Library seems to have attendance slowing and that usage may very well be dropping from historically high levels, this may be a potential solution to the immediate needs. Several trustees addressed the role that both they and City Council had in making sure that the library budget was at a level responsible to the citizens of Mount Vernon, and that they could not at this time and in this budget climate support an effort to raise permanent part-time salaries more than a small amount. At the end of the discussion, trustees tentatively supported a modest raise, with 50 cents an hour mentioned, as long as it could be supported fully out of the approved budget total for Part-time Salaries. Further discussion of how this might be done followed, including options like slight cuts in all part-time permanent weekly hours or the non-filling of the next opening created by a retirement or resignation of a part-timer. Mr. Correa asked that this item be brought back on the June meeting agenda.

d. Staffing update. Ms. Holahan noted that there were no resignations or hires in the last month and that the staffing discussions staff had been involved in lately were those covered by Mr. Soneda in the previous agenda item.

e. Other. Mr. Soneda shared that he had just received final numbers for the Friends' Spring Book Sale, which validated the subjective feel that all who were involved had that this was a very successful sale; total net from the sale was \$2,047.33.

I. Around the Table:

Mr. Craig passed.

Mr. Correa passed.

Ms. Odlin passed.

J. Board Chair's Report: Ms. Anderson had no additional comments beyond thanking Mr. Correa for asking Linda and Steve Burns to attend and speak.

K. Adjournment: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 PM. The next regular meeting of the board of trustees will be on Thursday, June 7, 2012, at 5:30 PM at the library; Ms. Holahan will be main library liaison, as Mr. Soneda will be at a Washington Library Association Board Strategic Planning meeting, in Federal Way.

Minutes by Brian Soneda, Library Director